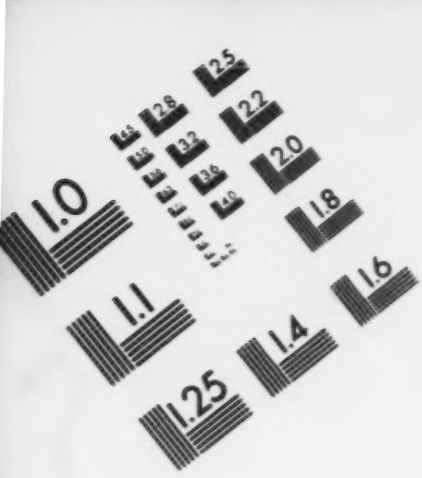

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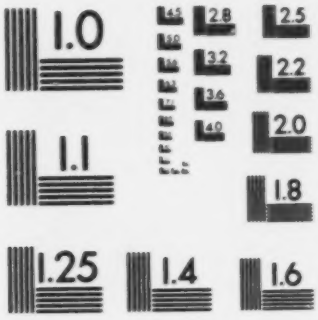

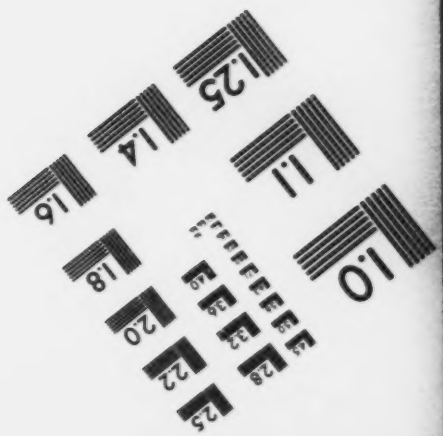

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ABSTRACT

In September 1985, the Prince George's County Public School System located in the Washington metropolitan area east of the District of Columbia, began implementation of a Milliken relief program to revamp its equity strategy. Initially, 10 of 117 elementary schools in the system were targeted for relief, but by September 1988, the Milliken program had expanded to a total of 16 elementary schools. Coinciding with the relief strategy was a systemwide conversion to the effective schools model of school improvement. Additionally, the School Development Program, which provides children with increased adult support and institutes a collaborative decision-making framework between parents and school staff, was introduced into participating schools in the district a year or two later. Student performance between 1984 and 1989, as measured by standardized achievement tests, had increased for nearly every school in the Prince George's County system. The third-grade student countywide average has risen from the 58th to the 75th percentile. The combination of the three programs in the Prince George's County School system resulted in a balanced approach to school improvement, one that accounted for both the human and instructional features of education. As of September 1989, the school system was the nation's 16th largest public school system. The racial composition of the student population was 65% Black, 28% White, 4% Asian, and 3% Hispanic. (KM)

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The Role of School Development in the School Improvement Process of Prince George's County: Lessons Learned from One Local District's Perspective

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The Role of School Development in the School Improvement Process of Prince George's County: Lessons Learned from One Local District's Perspective

Good schools promote educational success for all students. Other properties of effective schools include parents who support the school program, good communication among staff, parents and students, high performance expectations for all children, a trusting social and academic environment and an instructional and support program tailored to the specific needs of students. While there is some agreement on what constitutes a good school, designing and instituting the reforms required for success is the greatest challenge facing American educators today. This is especially true for schools which have not experienced much success in recent years.

This paper is the story of Prince George's County's attempt to promote success among a special group of elementary schools where, prior to the mid-1980s, success was hard to come by. Student achievement scores were among the lowest in the system, classroom disruptions were common and a low teacher morale was a blight on school climate. Through the combined efforts of the effective schools process, the School Development Program and additional resources provided through the system's desegregation plan, these schools set out to reform their instructional and student support programs.

Part I of this paper is a review of the literatures on school effectiveness, empowerment and parent involvement and how this research has contributed to our understanding of School

Development. Part II presents a case study of the improvement efforts of Prince George's County. Discussed in this section are the various components of the improvement strategy developed in these schools and a brief discussion on the outcomes of this process. The final section contains a discussion of major lessons learned from the Prince George's experience and is intended to build upon our understanding for both the theoretical and programmatic implications of School Development.

I. Theoretical Context

It has been noted how basic structural changes in society and the economy have weakened the "tight social networks" which once provided for the well-being of the community's children. The close proximity of the significant adults in a child's life allowed them to coordinate the child's nurturing process. A natural product of community politics was a local, de facto child welfare system in which strategies for the proper care of neighborhood children were designed by parents and teachers in concert. Yet basic social changes--in the economy, the nature of the workforce, and the effects of poverty in the community--served to widen the gulf between the school and the home (Cremin 1977, Comer 1980).

One premise from the research on school structure is that the organization of schools simply has not kept pace with these rapid and fundamental changes in society (Lipsitz 1977, Lightfoot 1983, Epstein 1988). Today's teachers and support staff must provide for the formative needs of children in addition to more

traditional concerns related to the child's cognitive development (Comer and Poussaint 1975). When schools are unable or not willing to meet the child's basic human needs, students interpret this to mean that teachers do not care about them as human beings. Students turn against the institution and its authorities through hostile behavior or attitudes or by simply refusing to learn (Leacock 1969).

A substantial literature, inspired from public opinion and a spate of school reform reports, has developed around how best to frame school improvement. Much of this work advises schools first to assess the needs of students and align the academic and social program to meet those needs (Eccles and Midgeley, 1989). Only after this foundation is established can meaningful learning take place (Goodlad 1984, Braddock, Wu and McPartland 1988). For the middle schools, the Carnegie Report stresses that this program realignment is best left to teachers who, with greater influence in classroom matters, as members of school-wide governance committees and in positions of instructional leadership, are the natural architects of program reform (Carnegie 1989).

Another important step in this reform process is to reengage families and communities with their schools (Hawley and Rosenholtz 1983, Epstein 1983, Moore 1984, Shraft and Comer 1979, Comer 1986, Epstein 1986, Carnegie 1989). Yet studies also show that while the home-school alliance remains strong through the early elementary years, its shows signs of declining by the fourth or fifth grade; in some cases, this connection vanishes

completely by the middle grades (Epstein 1986). In part this disengagement is the conscious choice of parents who want their children to grow self-reliant. On the other hand, some parents report feeling shut out by the schools (Baker and Stevenson 1986, Coleman 1987). Reversing this downward spiral of parent participation in schools requires a greater role for parents in the governance process, more and better information on their child's progress and legitimate opportunities to support the school's program (Carnegie 1989).

The School Development Program was born of this need to reconcile educational programs with the complexity of modern society. The challenge of the American school today is to resolve what Comer has characterized as the "paralysis of power" which exists between the school and the home. (Comer 1986, 1988). Theorists distinguish School Development from other school improvement strategies in three important respects (Comer 1988). First, while most improvement initiatives tend to target a single constituency (administrators, teachers, parents or students), School Development remains focused on the entire school community. The process is not complete if important school constituencies are not somehow affected by the process, or at least have confidence in the capacity of the program to make a difference. Second, School Development is grounded in child development theory. Improvement plans are designed with an understanding for the human development dimensions of schooling and a realization that these needs must be cared for or

meaningful learning is not likely to occur. Finally, School Development requires that the school governance team reexamine the appropriateness of existing school structures for current students. In effect the question becomes: Are there institutional arrangements present in the school which hinder the adequate functioning of students, parents and staff?

This brief treatment of related literatures speaks to the importance of aligning school programs with the social and academic needs of students. Generalized educational programs--academic, support, social--are responsive only to the needs of a generalized population. Given the diversity of needs and backgrounds present in today's schools, a generalized program misses too many students, leaving behind many whose academic and psychosocial well-being are largely neglected by their school programs.

II. School Improvement in Prince George's County

The Prince George's County Public School System is located in the Washington metropolitan area, immediately east of the District of Columbia. As of September 1989, the school system served 105,595 students in 177 schools and special centers. Prince George's County is the nation's 16th largest public school system. The racial composition of the school system in 1989-90 was 65 percent black, 28 percent white, 4 percent Asian and 3 percent Hispanic.

A. The Integration of Milliken Relief, the Effective Schools Process and the School Development Program in Prince George's County

Parties to the Prince George's County school desegregation case revamped the schools' equity strategy in 1985 by turning to magnet schools and Milliken relief to augment the existing student assignment plan. The June 1985 memorandum of understanding which governs this agreement stipulated that schools maintaining a racial composition of between 10 percent black and 80 percent black shall be considered in compliance of court-approved desegregation standards. In an attachment to that memorandum, parties agreed that compensatory and enrichment resources (Milliken II relief[1]) would be provided for schools with limited integration. Accordingly, Prince George's County began implementation of its Milliken strategy in September 1985, first targeting for relief ten of 117 elementary schools. By September 1988, the school system had expanded the Milliken program to six more schools in similar high-risk communities.

The Milliken elementary program contains the following features:

- Reduced instructional staff-to-students ratio (1-to-20)
- Full-day kindergarten
- Full-time guidance counselor
- Full-time media specialist
- Full-time reading specialist

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[1]So named after Milliken v. Bradley, the Detroit school desegregation case where this form of relief was first approved.

- Full-time computer labs
- Take-home computer program
- Reading, language arts, and math enrichment
- Enhanced field trip program
- Cultural arts program
- After school tutoring
- Summer enrichment experiences
- The Comer School Development Program

Designation of the original ten elementary schools for Milliken relief in 1985 coincided with a systemwide conversion to the effective schools model of school improvement. As part of this process, all schools in Prince George's County formed effective schools teams comprised of the principal and selected teachers. The effective schools team was responsible for the development of a strategic plan for school improvement based on the correlates of the effective schools model. Contained in the effective schools plan were the team's assessment of school problems, recommendations for action to remedy the problem and criteria upon which success of the chosen strategy was to be assessed. Goal statements reflected what the effective schools team estimated to be the highest improvement priorities for the school based on the team's review of the effective schools correlates. Most school improvement plans emphasized the steady growth in academic achievement for all students, a simultaneous reduction in the achievement gap between black and non-black students, a safer and more orderly learning environment, higher

performance expectations of all students and more parent involvement.

In most cases School Development was introduced at participating schools a year or two following the start of the Effective Schools Process. Initially, this sequence was difficult for staff as it was first perceived to be an activity that was separate and independent from the Effective Schools process. In fact, program officials have refined the School Development implementation process so that it represents an enhancement of Effective Schools not an addition to that effort. School Development uses the same three structures of Effective Schools; the fundamental distinction is the application of child and adolescent development theory to guide the school improvement process, together with an emphasis on developing positive relationships among members of the school community.

To summarize, Milliken relief, the effective schools process and the School Development program have bonded together to supply the theoretical framework and energy to institute comprehensive school improvement in participating schools. The effective schools model provides the planning and implementation structure for the improvement effort; the School Development program adds the human development and positive relationships dimensions; Milliken relief provides additional resources for participating to advance their improvement efforts. The remainder of the paper is devoted to describing the special role of School Development int he school improvement process in Prince George's County.

B. School Development's Role in the Improvement Process

Prince George's County turned to School Development as a means of providing children with more adult support and guidance, perhaps more urgently than any other time in history. The School Development Program provides a **collaborative decision making** framework between parents and school staff. When planning educational programs, the school planning and management teams abide by the "developmental pathways" (cognitive, social, psychological, moral) of students. Accordingly, some schools find they must change their internal structure to accommodate the variable pace with which children proceed along these pathways. Furthermore, this home-school collaborative provides the means to protect children against the perils of poverty, crime and violence present in some communities.

A second important principle of School Development in Prince George's County is the emphasis on positive relationship-building for students and adults in the school setting. Nurturing relationships among adults and students are viewed as critical to School Development. These support connections permit students to imitate, identify with, and internalize the positive influence of role models in their local communities.

The philosophy of School Development is expressed in the following statement prepared by school system's Magnet and Milliken School Office:

> Key to the Comer Process (School Development) is that schools must make adjustments to bring all adults in the school community together in a supportive way -- to create and ethos, tone, feeling -- that is supportive of children.

Thus, Milliken schools have established a vehicle through which we can restore trust and mutual respect in the school community through a natural process of school improvement.

The following are the three basic structures to the organization of the School Development Program as they exist in participating schools:

The School Planning and Management Team (SPMT): This is the school's primary planning group and is comprised of the principals, teachers, support staff and parents. The SPMT addresses the social and academic climate of the school in its development of the comprehensive school plan.

The Student Staff Services Team (SSST): The SSST is important to the developmental process as it focuses on a team approach to adjusting the school program to fit the developmental needs of students, especially those who are experiencing academic or emotional difficulties. Represented on this team are the principal, several teachers, the counselors and any school-based health educators,

The Parent-Teacher-School Association: School Development provides for the inclusion of parents at all levels of school activities. Parents participate as classroom volunteers, in conferences, as PTSA officers, and in the organization of special programs. The strong presence of parents in school activities guarantees their voice when considering school policy and practice issues. The overarching goal of consistent parent participation is to create a strong bi-lateral alliance between the school and the home--an alliance which works toward providing an appropriate and effective program to promote educational success for all children.

Some form of these three structures exists in all schools as part of the Effective Schools process. When a school adopts School Development, it requires two changes. First, school teams must become familiar with child development theory and begin to apply that theory when making decisions which affect students and colleagues. Second, the SPMT must have parent representatives and a cross-section of school staff, if they are not already members of this planning group.

C. Student Achievement: 1984-89

As discussed above, the inspiration for a coordinated school improvement campaign in Prince George's County was provided from basically two sources. The first was a new school superintendent who was dismayed by the low student achievement scores for many of the system's schools when he arrived in 1984. His response was to direct the implementation of the effective schools model in every school in the County. The Division of Staff Development began a system-wide training effort on the effective schools process, school staff planning teams were formed, comprehensive school plans were drawn up. Shortly thereafter, the school board and plaintiffs in the school desegregation case developed a plan which provides 16 predominantly black schools with compensatory resources in lieu of actual integration of their student bodies. This Milliken relief provided additional fuel for the effective schools process in these schools.

Between 1984 and 1989 student performance In Prince George's County, as measured by standardized achievement tests, has increased for nearly every school in the system. The county-wide average for third grade students has risen from the 58th percentile to the 75th percentile; the gap between black and white third graders has closed from 25 points to 16 points. The Milliken average for third graders, once in the mid-40s is now within four percentile points of the systemwide average for this grade level.

Trends for fifth grade students are similar, but less

dramatic. The countywide average for this group increased from the 58th to the 71st percentile between 1984 and 1989; the race gap has closed from 25 to 20 points and the Milliken fifth grade average has risen 18 points over this period.

The perceptions of school quality by Milliken school parents and staff provide promising accounts of this program. Parents express satisfaction in their new roles as school decision makers. They also report a greater quality and amount of communication between the school and home. School staff relate a greater presence of parents in the school, both as volunteers and in participation in school-wide activities. School staff report that the schools now provide an environment that is more conducive to learning. Fewer student disruptions and a more intensive focus on instruction by teachers and administrators allow for students to engage in learning activities. Principals also report a greater sense of ownership among staff and parents for the schools' challenges and achievements.

The school system is now engaged in research on these programs, with a special focus on the Milliken program and the extent to which it appears to benefit the system's disadvantaged students. One such study involves a three-way collaboration with the school system, the Yale Child Study Center and the MacArthur Research Committee on Successful Adolescent Development. This research consortium will study the effect of the School Development Program in twelve middle schools in Prince George's County over of a three-year period beginning in September 1990.

The study plan calls for a staggered pre-test, post-test design matched with a control group of middle schools not receiving the program. Separate survey instruments have been developed to measure the effect of School Develop on (a) school climate and (b) adolescent attitudes. The proximate effects of the process will be assessed by studying seventh grade students during their two-year middle school experience; a separate design component calls for a study of the sustained effects of the program for students as they matriculate through high school. In addition to student effects, teachers and parents will be surveyed at random to gather their perceptions of what effect, if any, the program has had on their schools.

To summarize, the Milliken program in Prince George's County is somewhat unique among school reform initiatives. By integrating the effective schools model and School Development, the program accounts for both cognitive and affective dimensions of schooling. Theoretically, the effective schools process provided the collaborative planning framework for the schools and encouraged an instructional focus. School Development augments this process with a strong foundation in child development theory while emphasizing the importance of positive, trusting relationships among members of the school community. What resulted was a balanced approach to school improvement, one which accounted for both the human and instructional features of education.

III. Lessons Learned from School Development in Prince George's County

Prince George's County has expanded the School Development Program from the ten original Milliken schools in 1984 to a total of 35 schools by 1990[1]. As noted above, School Development will be introduced in 12 more middle schools in September 1990. This experience has taught many lessons about both the theory of School Development and its application to educational practice. In this section the discussion turns to four major lessons which advance our understanding of School Development theory and its implications for school reform. These lessons also provide useful guideposts for school systems interested in studying the implementation dynamics of School Development.

Lesson #1: The Integration of School Development into the Effective Schools Process

In Prince George's County the Effective Schools Process preceded School Development in most schools by several years. Initially the introduction of School Development caused some consternation for schools which perceived School Development to involve a set of activities which was separate and independent from effective schools. The fear of "yet another program" burdened some school principals and teachers.

Since those early years, School Development Program coordinators have become adept at blending the effective schools framework with School Development in a fashion which permits the

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[1]Of the 35 program schools, 19 schools do not receive Milliken relief.

strengths of each program to contribute to the other's stability. The most important realization in this regard was that the program structures of Effective Schools could be adapted and used for the School Development Program. The governance, student support and parent involvement teams would serve both purposes; for teachers and parents the major change involved the infusion of child development theory, an emphasis on strong, positive relationships and the addition of parents and support staff to governance committees in cases where they were not previously represented. Once schools recognized that School Development required changes in principle and not in structure--i.e. additional school teams--the transition proceeded smoothly.

This union between School Development and effective schools has served to elevate the whole discourse on school improvement and reform in Prince George's County to a higher plane. School Development benefitted from the school staff's training in the effective schools process. Teachers and administrators were accustomed to team planning, assessing school problems, planning and implementing strategies to resolve the problem and evaluating the impact of the strategy.

By the same token, School Development enhanced the effective schools process. With its emphasis on child development theory and positive human relationships, School Development fleshed out of the Effective Schools model features which are embedded in the model yet often overlooked in school practice; namely, an emphasis on developmental theory and the need to develop a

constellation of positive relationships to support the school program. Ideally, schools first establish a climate of trust and caring which is consistent with the developmental needs of students; once the foundation is established, meaningful academic learning take place.

Lesson #2: What the Central Administration Must Do to Permit School Development to Flourish

The literature on School Development advises that the program receive official endorsement from the highest levels of school administration. Support of school board members and the Superintendent of Schools establishes the program as a legitimate and credible initiative; these messages quickly filter through the schools.

But verbal support alone does not assure the successful integration of School Development into the educational program. School systems must also provide a substantial level of what is perhaps their most highly valued resource---staff time. School staffs must have sufficient time to study School Development theory and to learn how to apply this theory to their own school programs on a continuing basis. Schools and the central administration must also yield to the fact that it takes more time to "process" or "committee" school business than it takes for one person to complete it. The development of the school improvement plan is a good case in point. School officials must also demonstrate patience in understanding that it takes time to cultivate a School Development program. It is not likely that test scores will rise during the first year of School

Development. The first phase of the process involves creating the conditions, school policies and practices that are developmentally-appropriate for children and conducive to positive relationship-building among school staff, students and parents.

Besides the time factor, another important consideration for school policy makers is their willingness to remove official policy which is contraindicated by child development or human relations theory. In this regard, elected school boards should be open to revisions in policy regarding the tracking and ability grouping of students, disciplinary policies, student eligibility and the role of parents in the governance process.

Lesson #3: The Sanctity of the School Improvement Plan

In School Development all significant school activity is guided by the goals and strategies articulated in the comprehensive improvement plan. In a well-functioning School Development program there exists a certain degree of synergism between the school plan and the School Development process. On the one hand, School Development theory guides the design of the school plan. In one review of school improvement plans in Prince George's County--one set from School Development schools, one set from schools engaged in the Effective Schools process but not School Development--School Development plans tended to pay as much heed to school processes as student outcome measures. This analysis provided evidence that School Development schools had carefully considered the appropriateness of their educational

programs in light of the developmental needs of their students and, consequently, recommended changes to these instructional arrangements. This is not to say that outcomes were overlooked or minimized by these schools. There simply seemed to be greater sensitivity to the connection between the processes and structures of schools and how students perform within those arrangements.

Likewise, the school plan affects all aspects of the School Development process. In effective programs, school improvement goals reside as the focal point of all school team activities. The efforts of the governance group, student support team and parent-teacher-school association are guided by the goals contained in the school plan. Staff development activities, improving student performance and behavior, adjustments to the instructional program, and relationship building---all these activities take their lead from the priorities related in the school plan.

Lesson #4: When It Doesn't Work, Why It Doesn't Work

As noted above, approximately 35 schools in Prince George's County are participating in School Development; that figure will rise to about 50 school in September 1990. Like any wide-ranging school initiative, some of these schools are recognized as models of School Development implementation; conversely, others, which may have been engaged in the process since 1985, have yet to mature beyond a rather limited rendering of the program. This raises the question: What factors distinguish the former

experiences from the latter and what implications do both of these program types hold for schools just now embarking on School Development?

One common feature of schools where the program has never taken hold is the reluctance of the principal to share decision-making authority with staff and parents. This is also a finding of the school-based management literature, a process which has much in common with School Development. Principals report that while the decision-making apparatus is shared, the onus for failed initiatives is not. The principal is still ultimately accountable for the decisions made at the school level; thus, there is an unwillingness or fear among some principals of involving parents and teaching staff in the substantive school decisions.

Other schools which experience less success with School Development often find themselves drifting away from their comprehensive plans, thus "losing sight the forest for the trees." In cases where this occurs, School Development represents a relatively narrow band of activities--often focused on increasing parent participation in the schools, without regard for the more fundamental advantages of the process. A related concern in this regard is the rush some schools make toward academic goals without the necessary changes in school climate and relationship building. When quick gains in test scores do not follow, the staff loses confidence School Development, concludes it is not for their school, and consigns the process to the

periphery of school activity.

Conclusion

To understand the full scope of school improvement in the Milliken schools of Prince George's County, it is necessary to examine the role of three separate initiatives enacted by the school system in the mid-1980s. The first involved the system's conversion to the effective schools process in 1984, introduced by a new superintendent who was convinced that low test scores were reflective of a school system that was achieving well below its means. Planning mechanisms were established and schools proceeded to formulate goals and strategies based on the effective schools correlates. Shortly after, parties to the school desegregation case revamped the system's desegregation remedy to provide Milliken relief, i.e.--additional resources for schools whose enrollments were predominantly black for 16 elementary schools. This infusion of resources supplied these schools with additional support for their effective schools improvement process. Finally, School Development, one component of the Milliken program, bolstered the effective schools process with a strong theoretical base in the areas of child development and human relations. In effect, School Development provided the schools with an academic and social climate conducive to making schools more productive and rewarding places for students, teachers and parents.

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